IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with <u>underlining</u> and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. When strikethrough cannot easily be perceived, or when five or fewer characters are deleted, [[double brackets]] are used to show the deletion. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

Please AMEND claims 1, 2, 12 and 13, and CANCEL claim 3, in accordance with the following:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communication support method used in a chat system structured to include chat devices connected to a network and which share virtual chat spaces configured on said network and which can send and receive messages among themselves, comprising:

associating and preparing specific keywords <u>prior to recording a chat volume</u> with specific keyword categories;

specifying said keyword categories wherein at ~~lease~~ <u>least</u> one of said keywords are included in messages sent or received in a virtual space;

associating and storing said keywords and said keyword categories with virtual space identifiers of said virtual spaces in which messages are sent or received;

calculating virtual space characteristics of said virtual spaces based on said keyword categories associated with the virtual spaces, the virtual space characteristics including a tabulation of relevance points associated with at least one of the keyword categories; and

reporting said virtual space characteristics to users by displaying at least one of a keyword category having a highest tabulation of relevance points and a list of relevance point tabulations associated with a plurality of the keyword categories,

wherein a <u>the</u> chat volume is recorded during a period of time after a message including at least one of the keywords is sent in the virtual space;

wherein the recorded chat volume is proportional to an amount of interest of at least one user participating in the virtual space in response to the message including the at least one of the keywords; and

wherein the virtual space characteristics are calculated based on at least the recorded chat volume.

2. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communication support system used in a chat system structured to include chat devices connected to a network and which share virtual chat spaces configured on said network and which can send and receive messages among themselves, comprising:

a category table for associating and storing specific keywords with specific keyword categories prior to recording a chat volume;

a virtual space table for associating and storing virtual space identifiers, said keywords sent into said virtual spaces, and said keyword categories;

a control means for reading said keyword categories from said category table and for writing to the virtual space table said virtual space identifiers of said virtual spaces into which at least one of said keywords were sent, said keywords, and said keyword categories, wherein a message sent into virtual space is acquired from said chat system and said message includes at least one of said keywords;

a decision means for calculating virtual space characteristics of said virtual space based on said keyword categories associated with the virtual spaces, the virtual space characteristics including a tabulation of relevance points associated with at least one of the keyword categories; and

an output means for outputting said characteristics of said virtual spaces by displaying at least one of a keyword category having a highest tabulation of relevance points and a list of relevance point tabulations associated with a plurality of the keyword categories,

wherein a the chat volume is recorded during a period of time after a message including at least one of the keywords is sent in the virtual space;

wherein the recorded chat volume is proportional to an amount of interest of at least one user participating in the virtual space in response to the message including the at least one of the keywords; and

wherein the virtual space characteristics are calculated based on at least the recorded chat volume.

3. (CANCELLED)

4. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 2, wherein said communication support system is additionally provided with a message volume storage means for storing message volume determined from a volume of messages sent from chat devices for

each virtual space; and

said decision means calculates said virtual space characteristics based on said keyword categories sent by chat devices in accordance with said message volume of chat devices in said virtual spaces.

5. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 2, wherein said communication support system is additionally provided with a channel entry time storage means for storing said entry time a chat device entered a virtual space for each virtual space; and

said decision means calculates said virtual space characteristics based on said keyword categories sent by chat devices in accordance with said entry times said chat devices remain in said virtual spaces.

6. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 2, wherein said decision means acquires specific rights that a chat device has in regard to a virtual space from the chat system, and calculates said virtual space characteristics based on said keyword categories sent by said chat devices in accordance with the rights of said chat devices in said virtual spaces.

7. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 2, wherein said decision means compares said virtual spaces characteristics and a keyword category and decides whether or not to report a message to other chat devices wherein said message including a keyword is sent from a chat device into a virtual space; and said chat system sends the message in accordance with said decision.

8. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 7, wherein decision means instructs the chat system to expel a chat device that sent an unsuitable message from a virtual space upon deciding that said message will not be reported to other chat devices; and

said chat system expels said chat device that sent said message from said virtual space in accordance with said instruction.

9. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 7, wherein said decision means additionally has a blacklist that records chat devices that sent unsuitable messages wherein said decision means decided that said messages would not be reported to other chat devices,

said decision means decides that said messages will not be reported to other chat

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devices wherein the sending sources of said messages acquired from the chat system are included on said blacklist.

10. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 7, wherein said decision means decides whether to expel a chat device that sent an unsuitable message from a virtual space or to report a sent message to other chat devices based on the results of comparing virtual space characteristics and a keyword category.

11. (ORIGINAL) The communication support system of claim 2, wherein said control means additionally acquires a message time of a message that includes at least one of said keyword from said chat system, and additionally writes said message time to said virtual space table, and deletes said keywords and keyword categories from said virtual space table wherein a specified time has elapsed since said message time.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communication support program used in an information terminal capable of broadcasting a message to chat devices which share virtual spaces configured on a network and can send and receive messages among themselves, the control program executing the stages comprising:

preparing a category table for associating and storing specific keywords with specific keyword categories prior to recording a chat volume;

preparing a virtual space table for associating and storing virtual space identifiers of said virtual spaces, said keywords sent into said virtual spaces, and said keyword categories;

reading said keyword categories from said category tables and writing to the virtual space table said virtual space identifiers of said virtual spaces into which said keywords were sent, said keywords, and said keyword categories, wherein a message sent in virtual space is acquired from said chat system and the message includes at least one of said keywords;

calculating virtual space characteristics of said virtual spaces based on said keyword categories associated with said virtual spaces, the virtual space characteristics including a tabulation of relevance points associated with at least one of the keyword categories; and

outputting said characteristics of said virtual spaces by displaying at least one of a keyword category having a highest tabulation of relevance points and a list of relevance point tabulations associated with a plurality of the keyword categories,

wherein a the chat volume is recorded during a period of time after a message including

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at least one of the keywords is sent in the virtual space;

wherein the recorded chat volume is proportional to an amount of interest of at least one user participating in the virtual space in response to the message including the at least one of the keywords; and

wherein the virtual space characteristics are calculated based on at least the recorded chat volume.

13. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A transmission medium transmitting a communication support program that reports virtual space characteristics to chat devices which share virtual spaces configured on a network and which can send and receive messages among themselves; the control program executing the stages comprising:

preparing a category table for associating and storing specific keywords with specific keyword categories prior to recording a chat volume;

preparing a virtual space table for associating and storing virtual space identifiers of said virtual spaces, keywords sent into in said virtual spaces, and keyword categories;

reading said keyword categories from said category table and writing to the virtual space said virtual space identifiers of said virtual spaces into which said keywords were sent, said keywords, and the keyword categories, wherein a message sent into a virtual space is acquired from said chat system and the message includes at least one of said keywords;

calculating virtual space characteristics of said virtual spaces based on said keyword categories associated with said virtual spaces, the virtual space characteristics including a tabulation of relevance points associated with at least one of the keyword categories; and

outputting said characteristics of said virtual spaces by displaying at least one of a keyword category having a highest tabulation of relevance points and a list of relevance point tabulations associated with a plurality of the keyword categories,

wherein a the chat volume is recorded during a period of time after a message including at least one of the keywords is sent in a virtual space among the virtual spaces;

wherein the recorded chat volume is proportional to an amount of interest of at least one user participating in the virtual space in response to the message including the at least one of the keywords; and

wherein the virtual space characteristics are calculated based on at least the recorded chat volume.

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